

# MEETINGS

*This section contains ideas on running a proper meeting. If you are operating a lake district or any other public organization you may also want to examine the booklet, Wisconsin Open Meetings Law: A Compliance Guide, contained in this section.*

## HOW TO RUN A MEETING

There are several types of meetings typical to lake organizations, but this segment will concentrate on planning and working meetings for small groups of volunteers who share common concerns, through lake organization meetings. Meetings are like making maple syrup. It takes ten gallons of energy for one pint of results.

As the 20th century closes, we find ourselves in a world awash with information and issues. We are asked to participate in all sorts of matters. Many of the concerns that face us are abstract and beyond our control. We may feel that instead of rallying our energies to correct the problems, we gather around a table and

***"Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world. In fact, it's the only thing that ever has."***

follow a meeting agenda. The word **meeting** can raise images of frustrations and drawbacks, but the truth of the matter is that most of the learning and planning and doing of this world happens when groups conduct meetings, workshops, seminars and the like.

Meetings come in a variety of categories and sizes, from week-long conferences to brief huddles in the hallways. There are meetings for your job, with government, with the kid's teachers and at the church. New technologies allow us to save valuable time by teleconference and computer "E-Mail" meetings. Each type of meeting has its unique characteristics.

## LAKE MEETINGS

There are a few unique challenges that lake groups may have to deal with when arranging meetings:

- Difficulty of contacting absentee property owners or other members.
- Finding adequate meeting facilities near the lake that are available when you need them.
- Picking a time when most of the participants and guest speakers can attend.
- Finding funds for advertising and logistics.

### **WHAT MAKES A GOOD MEETING?**

Good meetings share some common elements that should affect your decision-making as you plan your meeting. Try to answer the following questions:

**Why do we need a meeting?** Is there an issue at hand that can only be resolved by a meeting? Is the purpose to learn something, change attitudes and behavior, develop an action plan or stimulate commitment?

**Who should be at the meeting?** Who will be affected by the outcome of this meeting? Who can be valuable in assuring an outcome to this issue? What do we know of the interests, expectations, and individual differences among attendees? What are the possible outcomes or intentions of the meeting that can fill or fail to fill the needs and expectations of those attending?

**What do we need to do to accomplish our goals?** What are possible applications, materials, agenda items, human resources, or audio visual equipment that would expedite the accomplishment of the meeting's goals?

### **Guidelines**

The type of meeting (planning, training, informational) will determine which of the following guidelines fit your needs.

#### **Before the Meeting:**

- Know the reasons for the meeting and what you want to accomplish; state those reasons on the agenda. Focusing on issues that are within your control can limit early frustration.
- Every lake organization meeting should have a **written agenda** and time frame. Make the agenda available well before the meeting.
- List any reports and the individuals responsible to explain them.
- Send written materials with plenty of lead time if participants need to read or prepare for the meeting.
- Arrange to have a written or taped record of the meeting. It's vital to follow up the meeting with a written statement about what was agreed upon during the meeting and who will do what and in what time frame.
- Try to find some level of consensus as to time, place and some agenda items if a small number of people (2-20) are participating in the meeting.

- Decide how much time is needed for each item on your agenda. Allow time for the inevitable overrun, but remember that volunteer planning meetings running over two hours may be pressing the tolerance limits of those in attendance.

*Volunteer meetings over 2 hours long may press the limits of those in attendance.*

- Evaluate any commitments you will pursue. What's the job and who are the best people to accomplish it?
- Confirm arrangements for the meeting facilities.
- Send accurate, easy-to-follow directions to the meeting location (a map is helpful).
- If the meeting is being held by a lake district, it must be in a public place (school, town hall, restaurant, resort, library, etc.). See the segment on Wisconsin's open meeting laws for more information.

### **Preparing an Agenda:**

A well designed agenda allows anyone to facilitate the meeting:

- It should be precise enough to make it useful to participants.
- It should help the members get mentally ready for active participation.
- It should set the time frame and keep you on track.
- It should clearly state what you hope to accomplish.

Carefully consider the order in which you place items on the agenda:

- Avoid placing similar agenda items back to back (two time-consuming items, two high emotion items, two comparable subjects).
- Cover non-action items, items that require a routine vote or are clearcut, in writing attached to the agenda (accepting minutes of the last meeting, treasurers report, etc.).
- Items requiring full involvement and final action should have recommended time frames.
- Balance the agenda to maintain interest and to stimulate promptness.
- Allow the most time for high-emotion items.
- Open with items of particular interest and close with items worth staying for.

**Meeting Logistics:**

- If possible look at a selection of potential meeting sites well ahead of time and speak directly to those in charge of the facilities.
- Consider location, parking, windows (darkening the room for slides or A/V), lighting, handicap access, arrangements for food or refreshments if needed and any other arrangements you might need.
- Consider the politics; if there are three restaurants on the lake, consider rotating your meetings to all of them.
- Pick a meeting site that is comfortable and conveniently located. A public site is the best choice for a meeting (school, town hall, restaurant) unless the group is six or less. Lake districts are required to use a public facility. People may be uncomfortable and not participate in a meeting at a private, unfamiliar home.
- Send a copy of your objectives, plans and logistic details to everyone involved in those details.
- Send lengthy materials to be presented out ahead of time so people can come ready to ask questions.
- Arrive early enough to deal with any changes or misunderstandings.
- Make sure your logistical arrangements are in order (chairs, refreshments, keys, lights, parking, etc.).
- Assure that needed materials (handouts, audio visual equipment, markers, etc.) are at the meeting. Place handouts in the back of the room for latecomers.
- Ask experts to speak on complex problems and provide information on difficult topics. The UW-Extension can help find speakers.
- Consider the seating arrangements—classroom style, chairs and tables, desks, circular discussion group—and your reason for choosing one over another.

**Formal or Informal Meetings:**

The level of formality varies greatly for lake organizations. The size and the undertaking of the group often dictates the type of meeting that is held. Lake districts as units of government are required by law to meet certain statutory requirements. Lake associations commonly use "Parliamentary Procedure" to conduct their annual and other formal meetings. Robert's Rules of Order, Revised is a book often used as a guide at these meetings.

Formal meetings are normally used by large groups (20 or more). The chair is typically responsible for the content and the process of the meeting. Minutes are taken by a secretary and majority vote leads to decisions and actions.

Smaller planning meetings (up to 20 people) may choose to be more interactive and less formal. The leader acts as chair and facilitator. The group stresses team work, developing consensus and options agreeable to all attending. Notes summarize the meeting and actions to be taken. On occasion, large groups will split into smaller groups to use these techniques.

### **During the Meeting:**

- Always start on time!!
- Keep the meeting moving. Consider an official time keeper.
- Define and clarify the goals of the meeting.
- Keep the discussion on track and clarify often.
- Involve latecomers at the first opportunity (don't make an issue of their tardiness).
- State up-front the time assigned to each speaker or subject; sit near the speaker or have a sign to tactfully cut them off if they've gone over the time limit.
- Look for non verbal signs of controversy or disapproval; every attempt should be made to air these concerns.
- If an issue gets emotional (which may also mean lengthy), defuse it. Form a committee of the various advocates to investigate the issue; take a break and come back to the issue when tempers cool.
- Use active listening techniques; repeat what you think you have heard for the speaker's verification.
- Set a climate for frank expression.
- Be adaptable; if the meeting temperament calls for a change in direction, do it!

### **Minutes:**

The following thoughts pertain to taking minutes for large (20 or more participants) general meetings, such as lake organization annual meetings, where minutes are required. The recorder should keep accurate and impartial minutes in a notebook that contains minutes

from the rest of the year's meetings. Minutes should record what was done, not what was said.

- Begin by identifying the officers or leaders, committees, reasons for the meeting, time, date and place.
- List the number of people in attendance and note if that number makes up a quorum.
- Note the acceptance of previous minutes.
- Minutes mailed in advance need not be read for approval, although corrections should be noted.
- Record the treasurer's report as previous balance, total receipts, disbursements and present balance (attach the full report).
- Record all points of order and appeals for decision by the chair, whether they carry or not; record secondary motions only when carried.
- Identify each individual making a motion (mentioning who seconds is optional).
- List the actual count for and against on recorded votes.
- If requested by the group, note points of discussion.
- Note committee reports and mention major points.
- Identify any special speakers and their topics.
- If individuals commit to perform an assignment, list their names, the nature of the task and the date they pledged to complete the assignment.

### **HOW ARE YOU DOING?**

Have your meetings been effective in helping you accomplishment your goals? To hone the productivity and enjoyment of your meetings, consider rating them. Look at the various components and evaluate their effectiveness. Develop a numbered rating scale with three points if you need work in this area, two points if you are doing fine, and one point if it is a strong area for your group. High score areas need work. The following may be some areas to evaluate. Do you:

- Understand your purpose?
- Reach your goals?

- Have open communications?
- Deal well with conflict and dissension?
- Get necessary information and people together?
- Work well together?
- Have good leadership?
- Follow through on actions?
- Pay attention to process as well as results?
- Use your memberships skills?
- Understand and follow your organizational procedures?

**Public organizations and units of government such as lake districts are mandated to meet the requirements of the Open Meetings Law. See the Wisconsin Open Meetings Law: A Compliance Guide, which follows in this handbook, for details.**

## **REFERENCES**

- League of Wisconsin Municipalities. 1989. Handbook for Wisconsin Municipal Officials. Madison, WI.
- Morrison, E. 1983. Working with Volunteers—Skills for Leadership. Fisher Books, Tucson, AZ.
- Robert, H. M. 1979. Roberts Rules of Order, Revised. Morrow Quill, New York, NY.
- University of Wisconsin Extension. 1994. Starting a Lake Association, Fact Sheet. University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point.